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SUBJECT: IRAN: RAFSANJANI'S COMMENTS RE: KHAMENEI: RECAPITULATION NOT
CAPITULATION

CLASSIFIED BY: Alan Eyre, Director, Iran Regional Presence
Office, Department of State.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: The August 23 comments by Expediency Council President Ayatollah Rafsanjani in which he urged fealty to Supreme Leader Khamenei, was not so much a capitulation to the Supreme Leader as it was a rhetorical dressing of his more substantive comments, in which he continued to call for return to the rule of law and civil treatment of the opposition. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) On August 23 Expediency Council (EC) President Ayatollah Hashemi Rafsanjani opened a meeting of this body by calling for national unity, and urging adherence to the guidance of Supreme Leader Khamenei. Some internal Iranian conservative media associated with President Ahmadinejad (Fars News for instance) highlighted those aspects of his comments urging obedience to the Supreme Leader, and much Western press characterized this speech as Rafsanjani 'changing his political position,' in recommending a policy of submission to the Supreme Leader's dictates. For example, AFP's August 23 story title was "Switching Gears, Cleric Rafsanjani Urges Support for Supreme Leader."

¶3. (C) However, a fuller reading of Rafsanjani's comments indicate that his position on recent events has not changed, as he said "to deal with the current situation ~ everyone must follow the Supreme Leader's guidelines, abide by the Constitution, and obey the law. Lawbreakers must be dealt with properly, the current emotional atmosphere must be replaced with a rational one, freedom of speech must be allowed, and suitable responses must be made to constructive criticism. He also said that 'justice must be served in the cases of those who were arrested in the post-election unrest.'"

¶4. (C) IRPO contacts have also interpreted this speech as a continuation of, vice deviation from, Rafsanjani's post-election line. As a European-based Iran analyst told IRPO, "one shouldn't listen to the first line, which is always that Khamenei is of course our Leader and we should listen to him. What is important is what comes afterwards. Since his Friday Prayer speech Rafsanjani has consistently called for better treatment of the opposition on TV and radio and creating an atmosphere for positive criticism, redressing the violations that have occurred, and responding more rationally (and less violently) to critics. All of these concerns were in this latest speech. As far as I am concerned Hashemi is still a thorn, giving the coverage necessary for the continued activities of Mousavi, Karrubi and Khatami." Another IRPO

contact, a former Majlis representative, pointed out that Rafsanjani is a true pragmatist and far more politically astute than Supreme Leader Khamenei. As such, he is seeking to walk a fine line between opposing a Khamenei-Ahmadinejad alliance he sees as destructive to the regime on the one hand while also seeking to preserve the current structure of the regime, since the source of his power is inextricably intertwined with the status quo.

EYRE